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ABSTRACT

Reading and writing have traditionally been treated as separate processes, but some research on the relationship suggests that the two processes should be taught together. It is also proposed that skill in recognizing a text's main idea is a summarizing skill, demanding the cognitive and linguistic prerequisites appropriate to the text type. Good summarizing requires thorough understanding of the text, mastery of reading strategies, ability to remove unnecessary details, the skill to draw conclusions from the outset of reading, and focus on the main idea. Poor summarizers spend little time reading, do not draw conclusions, do not plan their writing during reading, and have difficulty finding the main idea. Research indicates that good writers see the summarizing task in broader terms than poor writers, and find the task more demanding. Summarizing can be taught as early as the elementary level by introducing rules and familiarizing students with different text structures and approaches to analysis. A brief bibliography is included. (MSE)

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SUMMARIZATION: INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING

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In recent years there has been a growing interest in summarizing: dozens of studies have been published concerning summarizing skills and their development from early age to college. Why this great interest in summarizing? Some probable reasons can be speculated:

(1) Summarizing as a means of finding meaning. Recent cognitively-oriented psychology has emphasized the constructive nature of reading and listening comprehension, ie. the reader, listener or hearer has to make an active effort after meaning and construct the meaning of the message for himself. Several studies have indicated that we can recall only short phrases and even these for only a few seconds. Therefore, in order to understand an extended passage, the reader, listener or hearer has to condense the text into meaning. Summarizing is thus considered to be an inherent part of comprehension.

(2) Summarizing as a study technique. Learning from text is perhaps the most typical task for students at school. Students have to read extensively in the various school subjects. To be able to get the gist of what they read is of great importance in their school success. This skill is even more significant in college, where students have to write term papers and theses.

(3) Summarizing as a testing method. Summarizing has become one of the few standard methods in measuring recall of text read or heard. It is frequently used in addition to recognition tasks and multiple choice questions. Before a more detailed account of summary, reading/writing relationships will be reviewed in the light of most recent American research.

1. Reading/writing relationships

Reading and writing have traditionally been considered separate processes. Since the 1970's new approaches to the study of reading and writing and

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their relationships have however been introduced. One of the reasons is the growing interest in communication and communicative competence instead of mere linguistic competence. There exist numerous American correlational studies on reading/writing relationships and, according to Stotsky (1984), they fall in to one of the following three categories: measures of reading achievement correlating with measures of writing ability: measures of reading experience correlating with measures of writing ability: and measures of reading ability correlating with measures of syntactic complexity in students' compositions. The correlational studies indicate almost consistently that better writers tend to be better readers, better writers tend to read more than poorer writers, and better readers tend to produce more syntactically mature writing than poorer readers (Stotsky 1984:16).

Pearson and Tierney (1984) view reading and writing as essentially similar processes of meaning construction. They are both acts of composing. From the reader's perspective, meaning is created when the reader uses his experiences and his memories of past events together with the author's cues. Thus the reader and the writer 'negotiate' meaning through the text, ie. writers create text and readers give it meaning. Authors frequently assume that readers give their text a meaning similar to the one they had in mind when writing the text. At the same time, authors expect some kind of variation, and they also expect that readers fill in certain gaps in their writing. Conversely, texts are read by readers who expect that authors have given enough clues about the meaning of the text to make it possible for them to reconstruct the message in accordance of a model as similar as possible to the one the author had in mind when writing the text.

A reader is able to assess the effectiveness of his reading while doing it, whether he understands what he reads or not. But a writer can rely on his audience only after writing. It is impossible to write without reading. A reader does not have to write during reading, but a writer reads his text, especially if the text is long and complex. In most cases, the writer and the reader are not involved with the text simultaneously. Particularly with young readers it is possible that the reader does not understand that he is in contact with the author while reading.

Results obtained in research dealing with reading/writing indicate clearly that it is of crucial importance to teach reading and writing together. For example, Squire (1983) states that reading and writing are processes which complement each other. His suggestion of the processes required are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Reading and writing processes (Squire 1983:28)

Before Writing:	Securing ideas Organizing ideas Determining point of view Considering audience
Before Reading:	Preparing to comprehend Relating to prior experience Establishing purpose Looking for the author's stance
During Reading and Writing:	Composing or comprehending Actively engaged emotionally and intellectually
After Writing:	Evaluating Editing and revising Applying outside standards of correctness
After Reading:	Evaluating Studying parts in relation to whole Analyzing how effects are achieved Applying independent judgements (preferences, ethics, aesthetics).

In the study of reading/writing relationships, more attention than before should be paid to the linguistic abilities of readers and writers. Special attention should also be paid to finding out how teachers teach creative reading and writing. The significance of understanding the structure of texts should be emphasized. If the reader under his teacher's guidance is led to the original ideas and intentions of the author by the organization and structure of the text, it will be easier for the student to write texts whose information and meaning are well-organized and easy to understand.

2. Finding the main idea in a text: summarizing

By the side of understanding the structure of a text, recent research has stressed the significance of finding and understanding the main idea in a text. The skill to recognize the main idea represents the skill to summarize, ie. the reader/listener summarizes the information in a text into a form which is easier to handle and easier to understand. Especially young readers often have difficulty in locating the main idea. Various explanations have been given; for instance the author has not been able to present the main idea explicitly in his text or he has placed the main idea in an unsuitable or unusual place in his text. Some researchers claim that the

fault is not necessarily with the author, but that some readers cannot understand the main idea because they do not have the necessary reasoning skills, skills to make syntheses or paraphrases nor skills to write summaries. Lapp and Flood (1983) claim that the ability to find the main idea depends on the situation. The reader may have the necessary cognitive and linguistic prerequisites to carry out the task with a certain type of text, but another text type may pose many problems.

What is typical of summarization studies carried out in the 1980's is that they seem to concentrate on what young summarizers cannot do rather than looking into their success in the task.

3. Qualities of good and poor summarizers

In order to write a good summary, it is first of all necessary to understand thoroughly the text which is to be summarized. Unfamiliar words and phrases should be clarified, and the text should be read at least twice. During the first reading the reader should try to understand the author's controlling idea and the purpose of the text. Subsequent readings can then help the reader to gain a better grasp of the details in the text. Reading for a summary requires mastery of different reading techniques, because the text types vary.

A good summarizer masters reading techniques: he finds meaning in the text and sees how different parts of the text are connected. Evidently, a good summarizer starts summarizing when he reads the text. He spends much time reading and thinking and only a little time actually writing. Careful reading rules out misinterpretations of the text. The reader colours the text unconsciously; he reads it in terms of his own experiences and imagination. A poor summarizer spends only a little time reading and planning and plenty of time writing. This might perhaps be caused for instance, by insufficient teaching of reading comprehension. Students are not instructed in the use strategies and procedures which facilitate the process of learning from a text. Also they may not have enough background information or the choice of text may not be the best possible. A detailed introduction of the task as well as instruction are of importance, at least to students whose reading skills are poor or who have difficulties in learning.

Taylor (1986) gave 4th and 5th graders a task of summarizing a 300-word narrative text and an expository text of the same length. The lesson

was videotaped and the interviews of the students were taped. Taylor analyzed the data and the summaries by good summarizers to find out about the processes and techniques required in good performance. He found out that a good summarizer drew conclusions during reading and removed unnecessary details from the text. The reading phase was also characterized by some kind of planning of what was to be written. A poor summarizer did not draw conclusions, did not comment on the text in any way, and did not make a plan for writing during reading. A good writer paid attention to the topic whereas an unsuccessful writer rushed into writing and neglected the topic.

Text structure seemed to carry more weight in summarizing an expository text than a narrative text. Mastery of structure seemed to help in locating significant information and deleting unnecessary detail. It was also related to the skill of making generalizations. Poor summarizers were not successful in generalizations. They rewrote the plot with all details, whereas a good summarizer found the main idea/ideas, ie. was able to make generalizations. The students did not seem to have difficulties in writing in their own words, but when poor summarizers were asked what kind of difficulties they had experienced, they stated that substituting their own words for the original author's had been hard. The successful ones said, however, that finding and expressing the main idea had been difficult. In other words, a good summarizer saw the task in broad terms; it required drawing conclusions and generalizing, manipulating the author's ideas, and creating something new. In contrast, the poor summarizers saw the assignment in narrow terms: it only required a substitution of their own words for those of the author. In general, poor summarizers found the task easy and thought that they had succeeded quite well, ie. they were overconfident. The good, in contrast, found the task very demanding and they had a healthy skepticism about their work.

3. Conclusion

Summarizing is a skill which is needed in everyday contacts, discussion, and reading. It is especially needed in studying, at school, at the university, and in job advancement. Summarizing presupposes a good skill in reading comprehension, which is perhaps the most important study skill. Mother tongue teaching has an exceptionally important role to play in the teaching of understanding and learning from texts, because analytical and

critical reading skills are an asset in other school subjects as well. Summarizing could be taught as early as the elementary level by using summarizing rules and making the pupils familiar with different text structures and ways to analyze them (Havola 1986).

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